



# snippets

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Issue 21

April 2010

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*Nominative case without Tense in the Niigata dialect of Japanese*

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It has been commonly held in the literature on Japanese syntax that nominative case is assigned to an NP by [+tensed] T (Takezawa 1987) whereas genitive case is assigned by N to whatever NP is contained within a larger nominal constituent in the configuration [<sub>NP</sub> NP/PP  $\alpha$ ] ( $\alpha$  = projection of N) (Mihara 1994). These two case assignment options are illustrated in (1a,b). These options also yield *ga-no* Conversion (Harada 1971) in (1c), where the subject may be marked as nominative or genitive.

- (1) a. [<sub>TP</sub> Shunsuke-*ga*/\**no* Tokyo-o hoomonsita]  
           Shunsuke-Nom/Gen Tokyo-Acc visited  
           ‘Shunsuke visited Tokyo.’
- b. [<sub>NP</sub> Shunsuke-*\*ga*/*no* Tokyo-e-no hoomon]  
           Shunsuke-Nom/Gen Tokyo-Goal-Gen visit  
           ‘Shunsuke’s visit (to Tokyo)’
- c. [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Shunsuke-*ga*/*no* Tokyo-o hoomonsuru ] riyuu ]  
           Shunsuke-Nom/Gen Tokyo-Acc visit reason  
           ‘the reason Shunsuke will visit Tokyo’

There are several proposals concerning structural and morphological aspects of case assignment in Japanese; see aforementioned work as well as Kuroda 1965, 1978, Marantz 1991, Harley 1995, and Fukui and Nishigauchi 1992. Details aside, however, the most prevailing assumption still seems to be that *-ga* is assigned to an NP by [+tensed] T within the TP whereas *-no* is assigned to an NP by N within a larger nominal constituent. This configurational approach to case marking predicts that *-ga* may never be found within DPs without [+tensed] T in Japanese.

My ongoing research on a particular variety of Japanese spoken around the city of Niigata reveals that this variety allows the possessor of a nominal to be marked with *-ga*, as in (2a-c), an option not available in standard Japanese. [Note: *noppe* is a famous soup served in Niigata.] Notice that genitive case can appear in the same environments in the Niigata variety as in the standard variety.

- (2) a. ora-den-*ga*/*no* tambo  
           I-Pl-Nom/Gen rice field  
           ‘our rice field’
- b. omesan-*ga*/*no* annya  
           you-Nom/Gen son  
           ‘your son’
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- c. baachan-**ga/no**          noppe  
 grandma-Nom/Gen    noppe  
 ‘grandma’s noppe’

This case alternation is also found with nominals with two possessors, as shown in (3).

- (3) a. Omesan-**no**    annya-**no**          sigoto    salkin          doo-da-bane?  
 you-Gen    eldest son-Gen    job          these days    how-Cop-Q  
 ‘How is your eldest son’s job these days?’
- b. Omesan-**ga**    annya-**no**          sigoto    salkin          doo-da-bane?
- c. Omesan-**no**    annya-**ga**          sigoto    salkin          doo-da-bane?
- d. Omesan-**ga**    annya-**ga**          sigoto    salkin          doo-da-bane?

The examples above show that the standard generative assumption that nominative case is tied to [+tensed] T does not hold *across the board* in Japanese.

A series of new questions arise. Why is case alternation permitted in this variety, not in the standard variety? What is the nature of nominative case in this dialect? One might analyze *-ga* in this dialect as an inherent case assigned by the head noun. Saito 1985 supports this position for standard Japanese based on the impossibility of subject scrambling.

The data discussed here necessitates reconsideration of the standard configurational approach to Japanese case marking. I hope this squib revives the interest of linguists in the nature of nominative case in this language.

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